



# VIP2VIP



Season 14, Volume 3

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

January 2, 2015

## Current Volunteers

### Castolon

Kenn & Linda Sutton—Camphosts (8th)  
Rick & Debbie Trimble—Camphost (3rd)  
Bob Douat—Visitor Center (9th)  
Ted Griffith—Visitor Center (2nd)  
Steve & Tina Ehrman—Backcountry (9th)

### Chisos Basin

Ed Davis—Camphost (10th)  
Doug & Kay Combs—Camphosts (10th)  
Dave England—Visitor Center (2nd)  
John & Sue Ewan—Visitor Center (1st)

### Panther Junction

Steve Blythe and Daisy Welch—V&RP River (4th)  
Joan Spalding—ScRM (2nd)  
Riley & Karen Caton—EMS (4th)  
Karren Brown—Admin (2nd)  
Allen & Becky Wilson—Maintenance (1st)  
Marisol Gama—SCA ScRM  
Bud Frankenberger—ScRM (11th)  
Pat Staggs—Maintenance (1st)

### Persimmon Gap

Jim Scanlon—Visitor Center (3rd)  
Dan & Rosemary Decker—Visitor Center (1st)

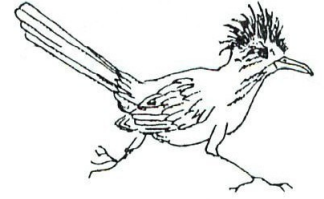
### Rio Grande Village

Terry Brackeen—Backcountry (4th)  
Jep Robertson & Renae Clark—Backcountry (2nd)  
David Marcum—Camphost (1st)  
Don & Karen Richardson—Camphost (1st)  
Glenda & Robert Overfelt—Visitor Center (7th)  
Jimmy Duke—Visitor Center (1st)

### Resident and remote volunteers

Reine Wonite—Park Videographer (11th)  
Jim Bishop—BBNHA

## Jon Jarvis speaks on the NPS Centennial in 2016



Planning for the centennial here at Big Bend has begun. The following is a message from the director of NPS, Jonathan Jarvis concerning the centennial initiative.

“There are many pieces to the centennial puzzle, but they all connect to one simple goal:

**To connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates.**

That is what it's all about. That's what we're going to do together.

You'll get tired of hearing me repeat this over the next two years, but I want you all to memorize our centennial goal because it's the key to our future. If each and every one of us connects the work we do each day to the Centennial goal, and we each **find our part** in helping people find their park, our collective actions will move mountains.

The week before last, the National Leadership Council and centennial coordinators from parks, programs, and regional offices came together in Washington, DC. We talked about taking the National Park Service's centennial from concept to reality across the Service.

As I told everyone at the meeting, you all have my explicit permission to begin planning and implementing centennial activities. Centennial events will start as early as April of 2015 and will continue through 2016. So now is the time to start planning and get creative!

The good news is that centennial planning does not have to be all new work for your park or program. Evaluate your existing projects and events; identify the ones that will help us meet our centennial goal by connecting with and creating the next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates. Then, as opportunities and capacity allow, take advantage of the centennial to launch innovative new projects and events. Thanks to you for helping us take this grand vision for the next century of the Service and helping make it a reality! “ -Jon

## Terlingua Tributary Studies scheduled for January and February

Natural resource managers at Big Bend National Park, along with many partners (Big Bend Conservation Cooperative, Commission for Environmental Cooperation, NPS-CONANP International Sister Parks), have been engaged with various aspects of improving the ecological health of the Rio Grande River and its tributaries for quite some time. To date these resource managers have determined that most environmental degradation issues associated with the Rio Grande can be attributed to an accumulation of sediment within the channel. The accumulation of sediment is impacted by several factors; among them is the type and location of riparian vegetation. In an effort to continue the work of improving the ecological health of the Rio Grande and its tributaries within Big Bend National Park, scientists and volunteers with the Terlingua Tributary Study will be sharing space at the Castolon RV sites from January 11-Feb. 13, 2015.



*Coyote willow (Salix exigua) may be the unlikely solution to improving the ecological health of Terlingua Creek.*

Over the past decade a 35 mile reach of the Rio Grande has received a great deal of riparian vegetation management work. Sites once infested with exotic riparian vegetation are now open and it is time to introduce native vegetation. Historical accounts suggest that these streams were once lined with large stands of cottonwood and willow. Mining and agricultural activities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries required the harvest of these riparian forests for fuel and structural material. Past efforts to vegetate Terlingua and Tornillo Creeks with cottonwoods were unsuccessful and the trees were scoured out soon after planting. This year, efforts will be focused on planting coyote willows (*Salix exigua*) within Terlingua Creek. The hypothesis is that because the coyote willows are small and respond to high flows by lying down and resisting scour they will survive and expand. Once the coyote willows are established and have expanded, Fremont cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*) and Goodings willow (*Salix gooddingii*) would be planted with the hope that the roughness provided by large stands of coyote willows would allow for a sufficient reduction in hydrologic force during high flows so that the bigger trees would survive.

The group will be planting coyote willows in Lower Terlingua Creek, from approximately Terlingua Abajo to the Rio Grande confluence this year. Future projects will hopefully involve Lower Tornillo Creek from the Tornillo Creek Bridge to the Rio Grande confluence, if funding becomes available. The group will also be monitoring vegetation changes. Up to 3000 willow poles will be planted, in bundles of three to maximize rooting effectiveness, in suitable mid-channel and channel-edge habitat in the 14-acre project site on lower Terlingua Creek, adjacent to the Terlingua Abajo primitive campsites.

Our park botanist, Joe Sirotnak is very excited about having the Terlingua Tributary Studies group in the park. Please take time to get to know these scientists and students and welcome them to our park!





The weather was spectacular!



The **Wilderness 50 Celebration** on November 25th was great fun. More than 350 visitors attended the event.



Entitled "Tools of the Trade" each demonstration area highlighted how our park deals with its "proposed wilderness designation".



Interp and ScRM manned the entrance booth and special guests from the "Subaru Leave No Trace Ethic" squad were on hand.



Demonstrations included Rough Carpentry, Pruning, Dry Stone Masonry and Mule Team Packing (Trails); Trespass Livestock Round-ups, Horse patrol, Search and Rescue, Rio Grande River Patrol, Backcountry Patrol, & Wilderness Preparedness



## The Mountain Lion Study resumes in mid-January

The National Park Service is partnering with the Borderlands Research Institute (BRI) based at Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas to conduct a mountain lion study in Big Bend National Park. Those of you who were in the park last January know that this was begun in January of 2014 and focuses on the Chisos Basin and surrounding area. Wildlife camera monitoring has been ongoing but there will be more activity beginning around mid-January and through mid-April.



Dr. Patricia Harveson, project coordinator describes the purpose of this study as follows: “The National Parks offer a wide range of services from protecting our natural resources to providing recreational experiences for people. Providing these opportunities for people to enjoy our wild places includes the potential for conflict between people and the wildlife that occur there. Big Bend National Park is home to two large carnivores, mountain lions and black bears. While conflict at the park between people and black bear has been minimal, there have been twenty-one mountain lion encounters of concern since 2004. Encounters have ranged from mountain lions approaching people in a non-threatening manner to those of more severity, including actual attacks“.

One of the tools which is used in conducting the survey is satellite/GPS collars. Two mountain lions were collared in 2014, fewer than researchers had hoped for. The difficulty of locating lions in 2014 may be attributable to severe drought conditions that persisted over several previous years, reducing prey and predator populations alike, and the reality that predators respond more slowly to improved conditions. Once the researchers know where the animals are, this information will be compared with human activity patterns around key areas in the Chisos Basin (e.g., trails, campgrounds, buildings, waters, etc.) in an effort to gain knowledge that could help mediate potential conflict. While the animals are sedated, they are also weighed, blood samples taken for DNA analysis, and other data gathered. The goal is for a total of 12-20 lions to be collared. Now we get down to the crux of the matter— exactly how are these collars going to get on these mountain lions? Trained dogs will be used to track and tree the mountain lions and then they will be sedated. In addition to using dogs, live traps (box-style) are also being used.

And you (and the visitors) may ask, is this safe for the animals? While the capture, sedation, and radio-collaring of mountain lions will result in some stress for the animal, and there is risk with any such operation, there is no other way to gather the data that BRI will need to monitor mountain lion movements in relation to human use of the park. Information from the camera traps alone would not provide enough data to effectively evaluate the potential for conflict between the two species.

According to Raymond Skiles, Park Biologist, the trackers and their dogs will get up very early to start a capture operation. There could be very short-term trail or area closures to accommodate the activity, but there will be very little impact upon normal visitor activities. The tracker being contracted for the work is very experienced in this activity and has performed this service on other public lands. There is a scientific document that describes the field methods and activities that will be undertaken and can be obtained upon request if anyone is interested. The other question that is sure to come up from visitors is, “if the researchers can take their dogs on the trail, why can’t I?” Refer them to Big Bend National Park Permit for Scientific Research and Collecting #BIBE-2013-SCI-0039. If they have one of those, they probably can take their dog on the trail!

## *Is it really time to leave in a month?*



**Don and Karen Richardson** will be traveling to Arizona to camp up and down the Colorado River, from Parker, Arizona up to Lake Meade. Then they will head back to Pagosa Springs, Colorado where they manage 10 campgrounds during the summer.

**John and Sue Ewan** write, “Having served here only two months, we have fallen madly in love with Big Bend. Not only is this place amazing for its beauty, but the staff and volunteer family have made us feel so very welcome. We would certainly like to come back for another season if the opportunity is available. Leaving here, we intend to spend spring at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, teaching some Environmental Education, helping with shorebird surveys, and watching a lot of birds as they migrate. After May 1, we plan to travel to Voyageur National Park in Minnesota on the boundary waters and serve for 5 months. Duties there include leading guided canoe treks, some land-based hikes, serving on boat patrols, and a little time in a visitor’s center. We sure hope to spend some time with Dan & Rosemary Decker (P-Gap), and Ben Welch.”

**Dave Marcum** will be heading southeast on 1 Feb, relaxing in the sunshine of the Rio Grande Valley area till the first of March ... hopefully in March, he will be a volunteer at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, working at the visitor center and/or leading tours there.

**The Suttons** are going home for the Spring but plan to help at White Sands in April. Their next VIP gig will be Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park in the summer. (The Jonkers and Trimbles will be at Sleeping Bear also....sounds like a party!!)

**The Overfelts** leave for a Panama canal cruise in April. They will be enjoying March with the dogwoods in east Texas and head for the Santa Fe Opera in August. In between they will be working on the house in Del Rio and playing with grandkids!

**Doug and Kay Combs** will be heading out the end of January for Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. This will be their 10<sup>th</sup> year as volunteers at Glen Canyon and every year they experience the mixed emotions of reluctance to leaving Big Bend and excitement of going to Glen Canyon. When they first planned to spend their retirement volunteering for the National Park System, the idea was to go to a different park every year. But after their first year at Big Bend and Glen Canyon, they felt compelled come back, year after year. Upon their arrival each year it feels like coming home to a familiar place and the familiar “park family”.

On their way to Glen Canyon each year, they usually spend a couple of days in Albuquerque, N.M. In their second year at Big Bend, Doug and Kay co-hosted the Basin Campground with a couple of great gals, Barb Bracken and Ronnie Reiner, who live on the north side of Albuquerque. Their visit with Barb and Ronnie allows everyone to catch up on the “news.” After Glen Canyon, they head back home to Ludington, MI, usually stopping in Salida, CO to visit Kay’s son and his wife. By the time Doug and Kay get home, the asparagus patch is yielding and the grass needs mowing. The cycle starts again.

## Events in the Area

**The 25th Annual Blackeyed Pea Off** This is an annual event you don't want to miss! Held on **Thursday, January 1st, 2015**, in the Terlingua Ghosttown. Turn in time is 2pm sharp, on the Terlingua Porch. There's a \$5.00 fee per entry. You can cook on-site or off. We have two rules: 1)Have Fun 2) No Beans! For a donation of \$5.00, you get a bowl, spoon and cornbread, starting at 2pm (after the peas are turned in to the judges) you can get your "goodluck" dose of peas. There will be an open mike, cake walk (this is a callout for cakes!), "hot date" raffle, and a surprise arrest. Proceeds will benefit Last Minute, Low Budget Productions. This year there will be a special guest Co-host, Tommy X Hancock. The very first Blackeyed Pea Off was a contest between Pam Ware, long time local, and Tommy X Hancock, which ended in a tie. We are, 25 years later, having the tie-breaker contest on the side. The public will have a chance to vote (for a \$1 a vote) between Pot A or Pot B (you won't know whose is whose). At 4pm cut-off, we'll settle this once and for all!

**January 4—Brunch at the Starlight Theater** will feature the musical group, Terlingua Tanz. Musicians are Jane Brown, violin, Judy Eron, oboe, Charlie Watkins, accordion, and Tim Callahan, classical guitar. Lots of fun tangos, klezmer and waltzes. Music from 11-2.

**Wednesday, January 14 Volunteer Awards Dinner** at the Panther Junction Community Room-social hour at 6:00 pm, Dinner at 6:30 pm. This is a special evening dedicated to showing our appreciation for our volunteers. Please make every effort to attend...we promise to keep the speeches short! This is not a potluck dinner...just bring yourself!

**January 19—Spring Orientation begins**-Many new volunteers are attending!

**Monday January 26, Hiking Club** (see below), 9 am at Panther Junction VC.

*There are a couple of Terlingua events that may or may not happen...I could not find out in time for publication. They are the Word-off (usually on Jan. 25) and the Terlingua Home Tour (around the same weekend). If I find out that they are happening, I will send out an email...both are great local events.*

### Hiking Club scheduled for Monday, January 26th

The hiking club is a chance for volunteers (and anyone else who wants to come!) to get together for a short hike, visit with one another, and see something that you might not see on your own. These hikes are not Olympic events, but rather moderate exercise with time to "smell the flowers" along the way. We will be taking a radio with us.



Hiking Club outing on November 19th

**This month's hike will be in the East District** and will consist mostly of wandering in the desert. Jane Brown will be leading a hike that begins about 4 miles from Panther Junction. If you are coming from Rio Grande Village, meet at Mile Marker 4.2 at 9:15 or so. Everyone else will leave from the rear parking lot at Panther Junction at 9:00 am. This is an off-trail hike to a spring and will take about 3 hours round-trip. I would consider it a moderate hike. Expect uneven terrain and of course, no defined trail. We will not have access to the gold van, since orientation will be going on, so private vehicles will be the order of the day. Bring a snack/lunch, water, hat, and sunscreen.